



For Immediate Release

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President's Statement on Forest Hills Central Football Game Intimidation Incident

“The NAACP Greater Grand Rapids Branch condemns all acts of racial hostility and intimidation directed towards all people, but especially our young people and children. Unfortunately---unwittingly or intentionally---some students at the Forest Hills Central High School/Ottawa Hills High School football game chose to prominently display and pay homage to a flag which has been appropriated by the so-called ‘Patriot Movement’ and other militia groups who are responding to America’s increasing diversity with opposition and racial supremacy.

Our NAACP Greater Grand Rapids Branch stands with parents, students and officials of many backgrounds and walks of life, professions and beliefs who have spoken out against the embarrassing evidence in our local community of a national trend to intimidate students of color at athletic events. From Pennsylvania to Missouri, and other states and parts of Michigan, the ‘Field of Play’ activities that should be the home of sportsmanship have become home to racial taunts such as blackface, displays of nooses and now supposedly covert actions. Celebrating flags co-opted by exclusionary movements, held next to political banners of a presidential candidate who has offended people of color and immigrants, and accompanied by chants of ‘Go home’ by some students at a majority White school to players at a predominantly African-American school are not coincidences by unaware students. They are intentional actions of intimidation and rooted in no agenda other than to insult, to injure, and to incite.

In the current socio-political environment, we are not surprised by such activities. At the same time, in keeping with our mission, we are not silent in the face of intimidation whether at the ballot box or the ballgame. We applaud our community, especially our young people -- of all races -- who did not react in any way expected. As we’ve always done, we stood our ground, and played our own game.

We win.

All of us tirelessly fighting to represent the interests of the underserved and overlooked; those of us who have mourned fathers, brothers, and children slaughtered for no reason; and, all of us who continue to protest the tenets of enduring institutional injustice, every day ... non-violently.

As a civil rights and advocacy organization, we also speak out against double-standards. Therefore, we clearly request that those in our community who dismiss this local incident while denigrating a football player who ‘takes a knee’ during the National Anthem to raise awareness of racial inequity, will recognize the bias preventing them from seeing hostility against young people of color. Left unchecked, those actions at the game may fuel tomorrow’s hiring, health care and law enforcement attitudes and decisions of the next generation coming from schools such as Forest Hills Central.

In addition to the apologies from school officials, we recommend that they provide their students the opportunities to not only learn about inclusion but the past and current forces of exclusion that they may intentionally or unintentionally celebrate so that our young people can be leaders of the American dream for all its citizens.”

Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest nonpartisan civil rights organization. Its members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities.

The mission of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination.

